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The Brasília Consensus: Differentiated Agenda Engagement in South American Regional Concertation (2023-2025)

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Abstract

This article examines patterns of differentiated agenda engagement under the Brasília Consensus (2023–2025), a light intergovernmental mechanism created to revitalize South American regional dialogue following the fragmentation of UNASUR. Although the Consensus adopted an ambitious roadmap encompassing seventeen thematic areas, early operationalization unfolded unevenly. Drawing on official documents, presidency pro tempore work plans, and semi-structured interviews with regional officials, the article maps how selected policy domains translated into observable coordination while others experienced limited engagement or were addressed through alternative regional venues.

The findings reveal a multi-speed pattern shaped by institutional legacies, issue characteristics, and rotating political leadership. Policy areas supported by dense pre-existing regional networks, such as energy, disaster risk management, health, and infrastructure, generated sustained sectoral coordination. Other domains, including migration, exhibited continued political attention but more limited institutional consolidation. In contrast, domains characterized by higher political sensitivity, regulatory density, or distributive conflict, such as trade, defense, financing for development, and gender, experienced limited engagement within the Consensus framework.

By integrating insights from agenda-setting and regional governance scholarship, the article argues that light concertation mechanisms allocate attention selectively, relying on existing technical infrastructures to produce meaningful yet differentiated regional coordination without supranationalization.

Keywords: Brasília Consensus; South American regionalism; regional concertation; agenda dynamics; informal cooperation.

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Introduction

The resurgence of regional dialogue initiatives in South America during the early 2020s unfolded in a context marked by institutional fragmentation and political volatility (Mariano et al. 2021; 2024). The erosion of the Union of South American Nations

(UNASUR), the proliferation of overlapping regional arrangements, and recurrent ideological shifts among governments generated what several scholars have described as a phase of reconfiguration rather than consolidation in Latin American regionalism (Mijares and Nolte 2022; Nolte 2022). Against this backdrop, the Brasília Consensus, launched in May 2023, sought to reestablish a platform for political concertation among South American states without replicating the institutional density of previous integration projects.

Unlike UNASUR, the Brasília Consensus was conceived as a light intergovernmental mechanism (Legler et al. 2025). It operates without a constitutive treaty, permanent secretariat, or binding decision-making procedures. Its roadmap encompasses seventeen thematic areas, ranging from energy and infrastructure to health, migration, defense, trade, and gender equality. This breadth reflects an ambitious political aspiration to rearticulate South American cooperation across multiple policy domains. Yet the institutional design deliberately privileges flexibility, voluntary engagement, and rotating political leadership through the presidency *pro tempore* (Bianculli 2024; Nolte 2025a; 2025b).

This configuration raises a central analytical question: how do policy priorities translate into observable coordination within weakly institutionalized regional mechanisms? More specifically, why do some thematic areas rapidly generate meetings, technical exchanges, and structured dialogue, while others remain dormant or are addressed through alternative regional venues?

This article examines patterns of differentiated agenda engagement under the Brasília Consensus between 2023 and 2025. It argues that early operationalization unfolded in a multi-speed manner shaped by three interacting factors: institutional legacies, issue characteristics, and the sequencing introduced by successive presidencies *pro tempore*. Rather than treating the presence or absence of activity as a measure of institutional success or failure, the analysis conceptualizes agenda dynamics as an outcome of selective attention allocation within a light intergovernmental framework.

Drawing on systematic documentary analysis—including official declarations, presidency work plans, and sectoral meeting records—complemented by semi-structured interviews with regional officials and policy practitioners, the article maps how each of the seventeen thematic areas evolved during the initial phase of the mechanism. The evidence suggests that agenda activation under the Brasília Consensus was strongly conditioned by institutional legacies inherited from previous South American regional initiatives, particularly UNASUR. Policy domains supported by pre-existing sectoral councils, technical communities, and coordination mechanisms—such as energy, infrastructure, health, and disaster risk management—displayed higher levels of sustained engagement than sectors lacking comparable institutional infrastructures. By contrast, politically sensitive or weakly institutionalized domains, such as defense, financing for development, trade, and gender, either advanced only marginally or were addressed outside the Consensus framework.

This differentiated pattern, however, does not lend itself to a single normative interpretation. While it reflects pragmatic sequencing under institutional constraints, it also reveals the limited

capacity of light intergovernmental frameworks to translate broad political ambition into sustained coordination across all policy domains.

By integrating insights from scholarship on regional governance and agenda-setting, this study contributes to debates on contemporary Latin American regionalism. It demonstrates that institutional lightness does not preclude meaningful regional engagement but conditions its sequencing and scope. The Brasília Consensus thus exemplifies a form of differentiated concertation in which coordination progresses unevenly across issue areas while remaining embedded in voluntary and flexible arrangements.

This article makes four contributions to the study of contemporary regionalism. First, it provides the first systematic mapping of differentiated agenda engagement under the Brasília Consensus, covering the period 2023–2025. Second, it conceptualizes the divergence between formal agenda inclusion and observable coordination as a function of selective attention allocation within light intergovernmental frameworks. Third, it demonstrates how institutional legacies and pre-existing sectoral networks shape the sequencing of regional cooperation in contexts of low institutional density. Finally, it contributes to debates on Latin American regional governance by showing that flexible concertation mechanisms can generate meaningful yet uneven coordination without resorting to supranational institutionalization.

Conceptualizing Regional Concertation and Agenda Activation

The analysis of contemporary South American regional initiatives requires conceptual clarity regarding the different forms that regionalism may take. As the literature on comparative regionalism has increasingly emphasized, regional arrangements vary significantly in their objectives, institutional designs, and modes of operation, making it analytically problematic to subsume them under a single notion of “regional integration” (Börzel and Risse 2016; Malamud 2011). In response to this challenge, recent conceptual work has sought to disaggregate regionalism into analytically distinct categories, allowing for more precise comparison. In the Latin American context, some authors have similarly emphasized the analytical importance of distinguishing between concertation, cooperation, and integration, highlighting how these forms coexist and overlap in regional practice without necessarily following a linear progression (Gomes Saraiva and Granja Hernández 2019; Malamud 2011; Rojas-de-Galarreta 2025b).

Building on this comparative perspective, regionalism may be understood as a broad umbrella concept encompassing formal, state-driven processes aimed at creating regional institutions. Within this broader category, it is analytically useful to distinguish between regional concertation, regional cooperation, and regional integration, each of which corresponds to different types of collective action problems and institutional responses (Rojas-de-Galarreta 2025b).

Regional concertation refers to arrangements in which states seek to coordinate or align positions on shared agenda items without creating permanent bureaucratic structures or transferring

authority to regional institutions (van Klaveren 1984). Concertation mechanisms are typically organized around high-level political meetings, such as presidential summits or ministerial gatherings, and rely on consensus-based decision-making. Follow-up mechanisms, when they exist, tend to be informal, weakly institutionalized, or entirely absent.

Concertation serves primarily political functions. It facilitates dialogue, signaling, and the articulation of common positions that may later be used in other forums, including multilateral institutions or interregional dialogues. Importantly, concertation does not imply binding commitments, nor does it require the establishment of permanent organizational structures. Sovereignty remains fully with the participating states, and decisions lack formal enforceability. This article distinguishes between concertation and coordination. Concertation refers to the institutional form adopted by the Brasília Consensus: an intergovernmental mechanism based on consensus, political dialogue, and the absence of delegated authority. Coordination, by contrast, refers to the observable degree of activity generated within specific policy domains, including meetings, work plans, technical exchanges, and implementation mechanisms. While the Brasília Consensus operates as a single concertation framework, the intensity of coordination varies significantly across thematic areas. The concept of differentiated agenda engagement is intended to capture this variation.

Examples of regional concertation include the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which functions as a platform for political dialogue and external engagement without a standing bureaucracy or legally binding authority. In such arrangements, effectiveness is not measured by policy implementation or regulatory output, but by the capacity to sustain dialogue and produce shared political narratives.

Regional cooperation represents a higher level of institutionalization than concertation, while remaining within an intergovernmental framework. In cooperative arrangements, states agree on principles, norms, and rules governing their interaction in specific policy areas and establish permanent bureaucratic structures to support these commitments. Although authority is not transferred to supranational bodies, cooperation entails binding decisions whose implementation is monitored through institutionalized procedures (Rojas-de-Galarreta 2025b).

Cooperation mechanisms are designed to address recurring collective action problems that require continuity, technical expertise, and coordination beyond episodic political dialogue. While states retain control over decision-making, the presence of bureaucratic structures introduces a degree of autonomy and path dependency into the process. Compliance costs are higher than in concertation, but exit remains relatively feasible.

Regional integration constitutes the most advanced form of institutionalized regionalism. It involves the transfer or pooling of authority through the creation of institutions capable of adopting binding decisions for all member states (Malamud, 2011). This transfer of authority may occur through delegation to supranational bodies or through collective decision-making mechanisms based on majority voting (pooling).

Integration arrangements significantly constrain state sovereignty and generate high costs of non-compliance or exit. They are typically justified by the need to manage deep interdependence and to provide credible commitments over time (Rojas-de-Galarreta 2025b). Classical theories of European integration were developed to explain this form of regionalism, though their applicability beyond Europe has been widely debated (Börzel and Risse 2019; Hooghe and Marks 2019).

From a governance perspective, regional outcomes are often shaped less by formal institutional design than by the configuration of policy networks, technical communities, and inherited coordination capacities operating across multiple levels (Castro-Silva 2025). This insight is particularly relevant for understanding selective agenda activation in weakly institutionalized regional mechanisms.

Positioning the Brasília Consensus

This conceptual differentiation is particularly useful for analyzing recent South American initiatives that do not conform to the expectations associated with cooperation or integration. The Brasília Consensus, as documented in this article, corresponds most closely to a regional concertation mechanism (Nolte, 2025b).

The Consensus emerged without a treaty, a permanent secretariat, or formal decision-making bodies. Its primary instruments are presidential declarations and a broad thematic roadmap, lacking binding commitments, implementation mechanisms, or enforcement procedures. Coordination is exercised through a rotating presidency *pro tempore*, and any follow-up activity depends on voluntary engagement by states and support from external organizations. In this sense, the institutional configuration of the Brasília Consensus reflects a deliberately “light” and flexible design (van Klaveren and López Giral 2023). The Consensus privileges informality, consensus-building, and political dialogue over legalism and bureaucratic density. This script can also be understood in light of broader patterns of institutional diffusion, whereby policymakers draw selectively on external regional templates perceived as compatible with domestic and regional constraints (Rojas-de-Galarreta 2025a).

From a conceptual standpoint, treating the Brasília Consensus as an instance of concertation avoids both underestimating and overstating its significance. It acknowledges the political value of reestablishing dialogue and articulating shared agendas, while recognizing the absence of institutional features associated with cooperation or integration. This distinction is essential for accurately mapping the initiative’s early trajectory and understanding the selective activation of its agenda.

By applying a conceptual framework that differentiates concertation, cooperation, and integration, the article situates the Brasília Consensus within the broader landscape of South American regionalism without imposing inappropriate theoretical expectations. This approach enables systematic analysis of the initiative’s institutional configuration and agenda dynamics, consistent with the study’s empirical focus.

Agenda dynamics: thematic activation mechanism

Beyond institutional design and formal mandates, early agenda dynamics in regional mechanisms can be productively analyzed through insights from the agenda-setting and attention literature. This scholarship emphasizes that political systems face inherent constraints in their capacity to process information and address multiple issues simultaneously. As a result, agenda formation and activation are shaped by selective attention, prioritization, and sequencing rather than by the comprehensive or linear implementation of formally adopted agendas (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Kingdon 2014).

From this perspective, the inclusion of an issue in an official roadmap does not guarantee its translation into sustained activity. Agenda-setting research consistently distinguishes between formal agenda inclusion and effective agenda activation, underscoring that only a limited number of issues can command political and institutional attention at any given time (Baumgartner and Jones 2010; Princen 2007). Activation, therefore, reflects patterns of attention allocation rather than implementation success or failure.

Jones and Baumgartner's work on the politics of attention highlights how political institutions prioritize issues under conditions of bounded rationality, responding unevenly to information flows and problem signals (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Their analysis suggests that stability in some agenda areas can coexist with inertia or neglect in others, producing patterns of selective engagement rather than comprehensive action. Complementarily, their research on the politics of information emphasizes how problem definition, framing, and the availability of actionable information shape whether issues move beyond rhetorical recognition toward operational engagement (Baumgartner and Jones 2015).

Applied to weakly institutionalized regional mechanisms, these insights suggest that early agenda activation is likely to concentrate on policy areas characterized by lower political sensitivity, clearer coordination gains, and the presence of established technical communities capable of structuring information and sustaining attention. Conversely, issues involving high distributional conflict, sovereignty concerns, or diffuse problem definitions are less likely to achieve early activation, even when formally included in agenda documents.

Princen's (2007) analysis of agenda-setting in the European Union further reinforces this view by demonstrating how agenda outcomes in multilevel governance systems depend on issue characteristics, institutional venues, and the strategic behavior of agenda setters. Although developed in a different regional context, this framework is particularly useful for understanding agenda dynamics in intergovernmental settings where authority is dispersed and coordination relies primarily on political leadership rather than binding decision rules.

Taken together, this literature provides a conceptual lens for interpreting early agenda dynamics under the Brasília Consensus. Rather than assessing agenda activation in terms of implementation performance, the analysis focuses on how attention, prioritization, and sequencing shape which

thematic areas translate into observable coordination, cooperation, or concertation during the initial phase of a flexible and non-binding regional mechanism.

In light concertation mechanisms, agenda activation is structured less by binding mandates than by political prioritization and technical feasibility. Issue areas embedded in dense transnational networks are better positioned to sustain attention and generate observable coordination. Conversely, domains characterized by high political sensitivity or limited institutional anchoring face greater obstacles to early operationalization. The following section examines how these dynamics unfolded in practice under the Brasília Consensus.

Sources and Methodological Approach

The analysis presented in this article is based on a systematic review of official documents and public records associated with the Brasília Consensus. These include presidential declarations, roadmap documents, press releases, speeches by heads of state and foreign ministers, records of sectoral meetings, work plans of successive presidencies *pro tempore*, and reports issued by regional and international organizations.

In addition to publicly available material, the study incorporates a substantial documentary corpus obtained through a formal freedom of information request submitted to the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Request No. AC000T0007122; response dated 24 February 2026). The request covered documentation produced or received between May 2023 and February 2026 concerning the Brasília Consensus. In total, 770 documents were identified and delivered, including meeting minutes, diplomatic notes, work plans, memoranda, annexes to the Roadmap, internal communications, presentations, and implementation reports.

While certain materials were partially redacted in accordance with statutory confidentiality provisions, the corpus provides systematic evidence of documentary production linked to the mechanism. The freedom of information material was used primarily to corroborate meeting recurrence, identify structured work plans, verify cross-presidency continuity, and assess the institutional density of engagement across thematic axes. It did not serve as the basis for interpretive claims regarding political motivations.

For analytical clarity, the seventeen thematic areas identified in the Brasília Consensus Roadmap were classified according to observable engagement during the period under review. Engagement was operationalized through documented evidence of: (1) formal ministerial or technical meetings; (2) adoption of structured work plans; (3) issuance of joint communications explicitly linked to the Consensus; or (4) establishment of standing coordination mechanisms under its framework.

The article also draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with officials and experts involved in South American regional organizations. The interviews were originally carried out as part of a research project commissioned by the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs

examining Chile's role in the Brasília Consensus and broader regional cooperation initiatives. The fieldwork was conducted over an eight-week period in 2024 and combined semi-structured interviews with a subsequent policy Delphi exercise. Sampling followed an information-power logic, prioritizing individuals occupying key positions in organizations relevant to regional cooperation and integration.

A total of fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted before reaching thematic saturation. Interviewees included representatives from academia (5), civil society organizations (4), business associations (3), and the public sector (3). Interviews explored perceptions regarding the Brasília Consensus, regional cooperation and integration, institutional design, and Chile's strategic priorities in South America. Following research ethics procedures, participation was voluntary and all interview material was anonymized prior to analysis. References to interview evidence therefore identify only the sector represented by respondents rather than individual names or institutional affiliations. Interview data were used primarily to contextualize patterns of agenda prioritization and sectoral engagement identified through documentary analysis rather than as the principal source for coding levels of agenda activation.

Semi-structured interviews with regional officials complemented documentary analysis by contextualizing sequencing, prioritization, and perceived political salience. However, the coding of engagement levels relied primarily on documentary verification across both public sources and freedom of information materials. This combined approach strengthens evidentiary reliability while maintaining analytical transparency regarding classification criteria.

The Emergence of the Brasília Consensus

The Brasília Consensus emerged in a regional context shaped by institutional fatigue and political fragmentation. Throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, South America experienced an expansion of regional initiatives, many of which combined political ambition with relatively dense institutional designs. UNASUR, in particular, aspired to function as a comprehensive platform for political dialogue, sectoral cooperation, and crisis management. Its institutional architecture included a network of specialized sectoral councils covering areas such as defense, health, infrastructure, energy, education, and social development, which facilitated regular ministerial meetings, technical exchanges, and the development of regional policy initiatives. As Sanahuja (2023) argues, UNASUR's erosion was not merely the result of ideological polarization, but also of institutional overstretch, leadership volatility, and declining political investment, which collectively undermined its capacity to function as a stable platform for regional governance. Over time, however, political disagreements, leadership changes, and divergent national priorities undermined its cohesion (Mijares and Nolte 2022). This experience appears to have informed the deliberate avoidance of institutional density in the Brasília Consensus.

By the late 2010s, UNASUR had effectively ceased to function as an active regional forum. Alternative initiatives, such as PROSUR, sought to replace it with more ideologically aligned arrangements, but these efforts proved short-lived and failed to consolidate broad regional participation. The result was a fragmented regional landscape in which cooperation became increasingly ad hoc and issue-specific (Nolte 2022). Yet the decline of UNASUR did not necessarily imply the disappearance of the technical networks, sectoral communities, and coordination practices that had developed through its councils. As later sections show, some of the policy domains that displayed the highest levels of activation under the Brasília Consensus—particularly energy, infrastructure, health, and disaster risk management—were also areas in which previous regional initiatives had accumulated institutional experience and specialized coordination mechanisms.

The return of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the Brazilian presidency in January 2023 altered this context. Brazil's renewed emphasis on South America as a foreign policy priority created political momentum for reengagement. Brazilian diplomacy framed the region as a space requiring dialogue rather than institutional redesign, emphasizing the need to rebuild trust and communication channels before pursuing more ambitious integration projects.

The Brasília summit reflected this approach. Invitations were extended broadly across the region, regardless of ideological orientation. The objective was not to generate binding commitments but to reaffirm the value of regional dialogue and to identify areas where cooperation could be explored. This political framing proved instrumental in securing participation from a diverse set of governments.

The Brasília Summit and Its Outcomes

The summit, held on 30 May 2023, brought together heads of state and government from twelve South American countries. The meeting was structured around plenary discussions and bilateral encounters, emphasizing political exchange rather than technical negotiation. The diversity of participating governments was evident, encompassing left-leaning administrations, centrist governments, and more conservative leaderships.

The Brasília Summit produced the Brasília Declaration on 30 May 2023. Subsequently, on 5 October 2023, member states adopted a Roadmap for South American Integration that operationalized many of the priorities identified during the summit. These areas included energy integration, disaster risk management, environmental protection, cooperation against organized crime, infrastructure development, migration, health, digital transformation, ocean governance, and democratic institutions.

The roadmap functioned as a catalogue of potential areas of engagement rather than as an operational plan. It did not assign responsibilities, define implementation mechanisms, or establish performance indicators. Instead, it provided a flexible reference framework that could accommodate varying levels of interest and capacity among participating states.

This design reflected a conscious effort to avoid the institutional rigidity that had characterized earlier regional initiatives. The emphasis was placed on inclusiveness and adaptability, allowing states to engage selectively and incrementally.

Institutional Configuration of the Brasília Consensus

The Brasília Consensus is defined by a deliberately minimal institutional configuration. No international organization was created, no treaty was negotiated, and no permanent secretariat was established. The Consensus does not possess legal personality, autonomous decision-making bodies, or a standing bureaucracy (Brasilia, 2023).

Coordination responsibilities are exercised through the presidency pro tempore, which rotates among participating states¹. Brazil assumed this role during the initial phase, providing political leadership and convening capacity for the creation of the Brasília Consensus (Brasil, 2023). Chile subsequently assumed the rotating presidency on 8 January 2024 and held it until 28 June 2024, when it formally transferred the presidency to Colombia. During its tenure, Chile oversaw the activation of six thematic axes identified in the Brasília Consensus Roadmap, specifically education, disaster risk management, migration, the fight against organized crime, energy, and gender, while ensuring continuity in two areas previously activated under Brazil's presidency, namely infrastructure and transport networks, and health.

In institutional terms, Chile's presidency pro tempore was marked by the convening of a meeting of foreign ministers and a meeting of directors of diplomatic academies and training institutes, reinforcing cooperation in diplomatic training and capacity-building. At the technical level, more than twenty virtual sectoral meetings were held, facilitating progress across multiple areas of cooperation. Chile's presidency also resulted in the adoption of two political statements: a declaration rejecting violence perpetrated by groups linked to organized crime in Ecuador, and a communiqué expressing solidarity with the government of President Luis Arce Catacora and condemning the attempted *coup d'état* in Bolivia (Chile, 2025).

Colombia assumed the presidency pro tempore of the Brasília Consensus in June 2024, exercising the role through December 2024 as part of the rotational arrangement established in the mechanism. During its tenure, Colombia articulated a vision of a connected and prosperous South America, emphasizing cooperation in key thematic areas reflected in the Consensus Roadmap. In its capacity as presidency pro tempore, Colombia participated actively in meetings related to disaster risk management and the Second Meeting of South American Energy Vice Ministers, where it advanced discussions on sustainable regional energy transition, including electricity interconnection, gas integration, and energy planning, and supported efforts to strengthen energy information management.

¹ Information on the rotating presidencies pro tempore was compiled from the official websites of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Uruguay (accessed January 2026) and the website of the Consenso de Brasilia (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile 2026).

Colombia (2026) also engaged in discussions on South American migration data management and presented proposals for regional cooperation to address transnational organized crime, reflecting broader priorities within the Consensus framework. These activities were part of the mechanism's effort to leverage periodic sectoral interactions to build collaborative platforms across member states, including initiatives such as the I High-Level Meeting of the Network for Infrastructure and Transport, which aimed to promote regional connectivity and logistics coordination. The conglomeration of these efforts under Colombia's presidency pro tempore aligns with the broader institutional thrust of the Consensus to facilitate dialogue, multi-sectoral engagement, and incremental coordination among South American governments.

Following Colombia's tenure, Ecuador assumed the presidency pro tempore of the Brasília Consensus in February 2025, continuing the rotational leadership established among member states. During its period in office, Ecuador advanced planning and coordination in key areas of the Consensus Roadmap, most notably in the energy sector. On 25 March 2025, authorities from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mobility and the Ministry of Energy and Mines, with the support of the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE), led the first technical meeting of the energy axis under Ecuador's presidency, outlining a work plan focused on accelerating regional energy integration through interconnection, coordinated planning, and sustainable diversification of energy sources, and laying groundwork for future high-level meetings on electricity and gas integration (Ecuador, 2025).

Following Ecuador's tenure, Uruguay assumed the presidency pro tempore of the Brasília Consensus in August 2025, taking on leadership of the regional concertation mechanism in a formal handover ceremony attended by senior foreign affairs officials from both Uruguay and Ecuador. In this context, Uruguayan authorities reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening South American dialogue and cooperation through constructive engagement, respect for diversity, and shared regional values such as democracy, human rights, sustainable development, justice, and the rule of law. Uruguay's foreign minister highlighted that the presidency pro tempore would emphasize technical, flexible, and pragmatic approaches to coordination, building on the work of preceding presidencies and promoting opportunities for cooperation across multiple thematic axes, including productive integration, education, energy, and the fight against organized crime, among others (EFE 2025; MercoPress 2025; Gub.uy 2025).

In September 2025, Uruguay hosted the first in-person meeting of the Brasília Consensus mechanism since its inception, convening national coordinators and presenting a comprehensive work plan to guide its presiding period. This plan prioritized eight thematic areas, particularly combatting organized crime and security, digital connectivity, education and culture, energy, disaster risk management, infrastructure and transportation, productive integration, and migration, alongside three transversal axes focused on gender policies, social development, and cross-border cooperation.

During Uruguay's presidency pro tempore, discussions also emphasized methods for addressing themes in combined or transversal formats to maximize synergies and avoid duplicative efforts

with other regional processes, as well as continuing engagement on core priorities such as climate change, digital connectivity, social development, financing for development, and health. As of late 2025, the presidency has continued to convene high-level dialogues and sectoral meetings, while maintaining Uruguay’s emphasis on an agenda that articulates both continuity with earlier efforts and responsiveness to evolving regional challenges. Foreign ministries remain the primary points of contact for coordination, with sectoral ministries and agencies participating on an issue-by-issue basis according to thematic relevance (Uruguay, 2026).

Table 1. Presidency Pro Tempore and Main Priorities.²

Presidency Pro Tempore	Main Priorities	Evidence of Activity
Chile (Jan–Jun 2024)	Migration; Disaster Risk Management; Transnational Organized Crime	Ministerial meetings; Lima Declaration; migration coordination initiatives; security dialogue
Colombia (Jul–Dec 2024)	Energy; Infrastructure and Transport; Defense and Security Cooperation	Bogotá Energy Meeting; Infrastructure and Transport Network; Defense Ministers’ Dialogue
Ecuador (Jan–Jun 2025)	Energy Integration; Digital Connectivity; Disaster Risk Management	Energy work plan; digital connectivity initiative; continuation of disaster-risk cooperation
Uruguay (Jul–Dec 2025)	Organized Crime; Migration; Productive Integration	Planned agenda and announced initiatives

Source: Own elaboration.

The variation in priorities across presidencies suggests that the Roadmap did not operate as a comprehensive implementation agenda. Rather, successive presidencies functioned as agenda filters, selecting a limited subset of thematic areas for active promotion. The absence of formal councils, committees, or working groups means that cooperation under the Brasília Consensus depends on voluntary engagement and ad hoc arrangements. States may choose to participate in specific initiatives while abstaining from others, and there is no obligation to engage across the entire agenda. A notable feature of the Consensus is its reliance on external organizations for technical and administrative support. In areas where activity occurred, regional and international organizations, including the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Latin American and Caribbean Energy Organization (OLACDE), and agencies within the United Nations system, provided platforms for coordination, data exchange, and

² Priorities were identified from official presidency work plans, presentations delivered at the meeting of national coordinators, and final presidency reports.

technical assistance. These organizations operated alongside the Consensus without being formally incorporated into its structure. This institutional configuration reflects a broader trend toward flexible and informal regionalism in South America, privileging political concertation over formal integration (Mariano et al., 2024; Nolte 2025b).

Differentiated Agenda Engagement under the Brasília Consensus (2023–2025)

The trajectory of the Brasília Consensus between 2023 and 2025 reveals a differentiated pattern of thematic engagement rather than uniform operationalization across the seventeen areas identified in the roadmap. Evidence drawn from official declarations, presidency *pro tempore* work plans (Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Uruguay), annexes to the roadmap implementation documents, and sectoral meeting records indicates that engagement has clustered around a limited number of policy domains characterized by institutional legacies and technical feasibility. The observed pattern is consistent with the institutional legacy argument developed above. The sectors displaying the highest levels of activation—energy, infrastructure, health, and disaster risk management—are also those in which previous South American regional initiatives, particularly UNASUR, had developed specialized councils, technical networks, and accumulated coordination experience.

Institutional Legacies from UNASUR and Sectoral Capacity Inheritance

Existing research on regional organizations suggests that institutional effects often persist beyond the formal decline or paralysis of organizations themselves. Regional institutions can generate enduring legacies in the form of technical networks, bureaucratic routines, epistemic communities, policy frameworks, and sectoral coordination mechanisms that continue to shape subsequent patterns of cooperation. Even when formal organizations lose political support or cease to operate effectively, these accumulated capacities may remain available for future coordination efforts.

This insight is particularly relevant for understanding the Brasília Consensus. Although the initiative emerged in a political context marked by the fragmentation of South American regionalism and the collapse of UNASUR as an active organization, it did not develop in an institutional vacuum. Several policy domains incorporated into the Brasília Roadmap had previously been addressed through UNASUR's sectoral councils and specialized networks. Energy cooperation benefited from the legacy of the South American Energy Council; infrastructure initiatives built upon the experience accumulated through the South American Infrastructure and Planning Council (COSIPLAN); health cooperation drew on the institutional memory of the South American Health Council; and disaster risk management relied on technical networks established through previous regional coordination mechanisms. In contrast, other areas included in the Roadmap lacked comparable institutional infrastructures or inherited networks.

This distinction suggests that agenda activation under the Brasília Consensus may be conditioned not only by the political priorities of successive Presidencies Pro Tempore but also by the uneven distribution of inherited regional capacities. Policy domains supported by pre-existing technical communities, established channels of interaction, and accumulated institutional experience should be more likely to generate sustained coordination than areas lacking comparable legacies. From this perspective, differentiated agenda engagement reflects both contemporary political choices and the path-dependent effects of previous cycles of South American regionalism (Bennett and Elman 2017; Mahoney 2000).

The argument advanced in this article therefore extends existing scholarship on regional concertation by highlighting the role of sectoral institutional inheritance. Rather than viewing the Brasília Consensus as a wholly new initiative, the evidence suggests that it operates, at least in part, through the selective reactivation of capacities developed during earlier regional experiences. The persistence of cooperation in areas such as energy, infrastructure, health, and disaster risk management appears closely linked to the existence of institutional legacies that survived the organizational decline of UNASUR itself.

Sustained Sectoral Coordination Anchored in Institutional Legacies

Energy stands out as one of the most consolidated axes of coordination. Documentation from successive presidencies pro tempore—including ministerial agendas and technical meeting summaries—shows regular convening of national energy authorities. Discussions focused on electrical interconnection, gas integration, regional planning, and energy information systems. Importantly, these exchanges were not initiated ex nihilo under the Brasília Consensus; they relied heavily on long-standing regional cooperation mechanisms, particularly OLACDE and earlier interconnection initiatives. The recurrence of meetings across presidencies and the articulation of structured lines of action suggest not merely rhetorical prioritization but ongoing sectoral consolidation rooted in pre-existing transnational technical networks.

The consolidation of the energy agenda is also reflected in presidency work plans. Colombia's presidency explicitly identified energy as a priority sector and promoted discussions on electricity interconnection, gas integration, regional energy planning, and information-sharing systems. Ecuador subsequently maintained energy among its priority areas and, with the support of OLACDE, advanced a work programme focused on interconnection, coordinated planning, and regional energy security. According to the Colombian Presidency Pro Tempore Work Plan, cooperation focused specifically on electricity interconnection, gas integration, regional energy planning, and information-sharing systems, while Ecuador's subsequent work programme maintained these priorities and proposed a sequence of technical and vice-ministerial meetings devoted to regional energy integration. The recurrence of these priorities across successive presidencies indicates that energy moved beyond agenda inclusion and became one of the most institutionalized areas of engagement within the Consensus.

Unlike most thematic areas included in the Roadmap, disaster risk management developed a medium-term implementation framework assigning responsibilities, timelines, and deliverables to participating countries. Beyond regular technical exchanges, participating countries established the South American Working Group for Integrated Disaster Risk Management, adopted a 2025–2026 Work Plan, and created three specialized subgroups devoted to regional risk mapping, mutual assistance mechanisms, and preparedness and mitigation frameworks. The development of a South American Risk and Capabilities Map and a regional inventory of response capacities suggests a transition from political dialogue toward structured technical coordination. The 2025–2026 Work Plan assigned responsibilities, timelines, and deliverables to each subgroup, making disaster risk management one of the few thematic areas to develop a medium-term implementation framework.

Health cooperation also benefited from dense institutional legacies. Sectoral meetings documented under Ecuador's presidency and earlier exchanges reveal continuity with regional epidemiological surveillance networks and ministerial dialogues developed over previous decades. The agenda centered on information-sharing, preparedness, and coordination rather than harmonization of health systems. Nonetheless, the regularity of exchanges and the participation of ministries of health indicate structured sectoral engagement rather than episodic political signaling.

Infrastructure and Transport display a similarly robust trajectory. Building on the legacy of IIRSA and subsequent regional connectivity initiatives, this axis generated one of the most structured patterns of engagement observed in the documentary corpus. Presidency work plans, technical reports, and high-level meetings reference the development of a regional project bank, discussions on a South American infrastructure observatory, and the identification of strategic logistics corridors. These initiatives were discussed during the High-Level Meeting of the South American Infrastructure and Transport Network held in Bogotá in December 2024 and subsequently incorporated into sectoral work plans. The Bogotá meeting also served as the basis for subsequent discussions on a regional project bank and a South American infrastructure observatory. They were further supported by organizations such as CAF, BID, and FONPLATA, providing technical continuity across presidencies. The existence of identifiable outputs and recurring sectoral meetings suggests a level of institutional consolidation exceeded by few other thematic areas.

Migration presents a more ambiguous trajectory. Presidency documents and sectoral meeting records indicate efforts to strengthen regional coordination in response to irregular migration flows and humanitarian pressures, particularly those associated with Venezuelan displacement. Chile briefly prioritized migration during its presidency and promoted technical exchanges on regional information-sharing mechanisms, while Colombia supported discussions on migration data management. However, unlike energy, disaster risk management, or infrastructure, migration did not generate permanent working structures, multi-year work plans, or recurrent technical mechanisms. Its trajectory is therefore better characterized as sustained political attention combined with limited institutional consolidation.

Incipient and Politically Constrained Domains

Organized crime occupies an intermediate position between highly activated and weakly activated policy domains. Unlike areas such as energy or disaster risk management, the issue did not generate extensive technical architectures or multi-year implementation frameworks. Nevertheless, documentary evidence indicates a sustained level of political attention across successive presidencies. Chile identified the fight against transnational organized crime as one of its principal priorities, and subsequent meetings promoted exchanges on policing, intelligence cooperation, prison systems, and transnational criminal networks. Sectoral discussions also involved collaboration with existing regional mechanisms, including AMERIPOL, and reflected growing concern regarding the expansion of organized criminal groups across South America.

At the same time, the trajectory of the agenda reveals the limits of regional cooperation in highly sensitive security domains. While governments broadly agreed on the need for enhanced cooperation, progress remained concentrated in information-sharing, technical exchanges, and dialogue among national authorities. The documentary corpus provides comparatively limited evidence of permanent working structures, detailed implementation plans, or formalized regional mechanisms comparable to those observed in energy, infrastructure, or disaster risk management. As a result, organized crime generated more sustained engagement than most politically sensitive sectors, but fell short of the level of institutional consolidation achieved in the most active policy domains.

The case therefore illustrates a broader pattern within the Brasília Consensus. High political salience can sustain recurring coordination efforts even in the absence of dense institutional infrastructures. However, the translation of political concern into durable regional mechanisms appears to depend on the availability of technical capacities, specialized networks, and implementation structures capable of supporting cooperation beyond periodic ministerial meetings.

Climate change presents a different pattern of constrained engagement. Despite its prominence in global governance debates and its relevance for South American countries, the issue generated relatively limited activity within the Brasília Consensus. Documentary evidence indicates sporadic discussions concerning regional coordination ahead of COP30 and proposals for enhanced cooperation in environmental governance. However, these initiatives did not translate into sustained meeting schedules, specialized working groups, or multi-year sectoral plans. Compared with areas such as energy or disaster risk management, climate cooperation remained largely aspirational and lacked the organizational density required for sustained activation.

Defense illustrates the limits of institutional inheritance as a driver of agenda activation. Unlike many other policy domains, defense cooperation benefited from a substantial legacy derived from the South American Defense Council, which had constituted one of UNASUR's most visible sectoral initiatives. Nevertheless, documentary evidence suggests that contemporary political sensitivities constrained efforts to reactivate this agenda. Although Colombia's presidency incorporated defense and security cooperation among its priority areas and convened ministerial-level

discussions, the documentary record reveals relatively limited follow-up activity when compared with sectors such as energy, infrastructure, or disaster risk management. The issue remained largely confined to political dialogue and confidence-building exchanges, without generating comparable technical structures, work programmes, or implementation mechanisms.

Productive Integration has advanced modestly through the designation of focal points and exploratory discussions referenced in presidency annexes. However, continuity and operational depth remain limited.

The documentary corpus reveals substantial variation in the density of activity across thematic areas. Colombia’s presidency alone reported forty-one sectoral meetings, yet these were distributed unevenly across policy domains. Energy, disaster risk management, infrastructure, health, and education concentrated a disproportionate share of technical exchanges, work plans, and follow-up activities, whereas other roadmap themes generated few meetings or remained largely dormant. This uneven distribution of documentary production provides direct evidence of differentiated agenda engagement under the Brasília Consensus.

Table 2. Differentiated Patterns of Agenda Engagement under the Brasília Consensus (2023–2025)

Level of Engagement	Thematic Areas	Main Characteristics
High and Sustained Sectoral Coordination	Energy; Disaster Risk Management; Health; Infrastructure and Transport	Regular ministerial or technical meetings; structured work plans; reliance on pre-existing regional networks; continuity across presidencies
Structured but Limited Engagement	Organized Crime; Education and Culture; Social Development; Food Security; Digital Connectivity; Migration	Creation of networks or working groups; thematic meetings; primarily consultative exchanges; limited operational depth
Incipient or Politically Constrained Engagement	Climate Change; Defense; Productive Integration	Political declarations or initial coordination steps; emerging technical initiatives; high political sensitivity; uneven continuity
Not Addressed within the Brasília Consensus Framework	Trade and Investment; Cross-Border Cooperation; Financing for Development; Gender	No sustained activity under the Consensus; issues handled through alternative regional or subregional mechanisms; or politically constrained under current regional conditions

Source: Own elaboration

Domains Addressed Outside the Consensus Framework

Trade and Investment, Cross-Border Cooperation, and Financing for Development show little structured engagement within the Brasília Consensus itself. Documentary evidence suggests

that these issues continue to be managed primarily through alternative regional and subregional mechanisms. Their relative absence within the Consensus should therefore be interpreted as functional differentiation rather than institutional omission.

Gender equality, although formally included in the roadmap, did not translate into sustained coordination structures during the period examined. This relative marginalization contrasts with the growing centrality of gender-related provisions in contemporary trade agreements, where chapters on inclusive trade, care policies, and women's economic empowerment have gained prominence. The limited prioritization of this axis within the Brasília Consensus appears to reflect the current political configuration of the region, where ideological divergence and domestic contestation reduce incentives to advance regionally coordinated gender initiatives. The case of gender thus illustrates how issue salience at the global level does not automatically translate into activation within light intergovernmental regional frameworks.

The non-engagement of certain thematic areas also raises a more critical question. While the absence of structured coordination can be interpreted as a strategic adaptation to political and regulatory constraints, it may simultaneously signal institutional limitation. The inclusion of trade, financing for development, defense, and gender in the official roadmap generated formal expectations of follow-up. Their subsequent stagnation suggests that light institutional design may facilitate selective coordination but struggle to sustain politically demanding agendas. In this sense, differentiated engagement reflects both functional adaptation and bounded institutional capacity.

From Broad Ambition to Differentiated Sequencing

Taken together, the evidence indicates that the Brasília Consensus has evolved as a flexible platform that rearticulates existing regional infrastructures selectively. Domains supported by mature technical networks and lower distributive conflict have generated structured and recurrent coordination. In contrast, politically sensitive or weakly institutionalized areas have progressed cautiously or remained peripheral within the Consensus framework.

This differentiated sequencing does not necessarily reflect institutional fragility, although it reveals the limits inherent in light concertation mechanisms. Rather, it is consistent with a light intergovernmental design that privileges feasibility, voluntary engagement, and the strategic prioritization introduced by rotating presidencies *pro tempore*. The Brasília Consensus thus exemplifies a form of contemporary South American regional concertation characterized by uneven yet pragmatic coordination across policy domains.

A cross-cutting pattern emerging from the evidence is a preference for sectoral coordination mechanisms capable of generating immediate functional benefits—such as information exchange, confidence-building, and technical articulation—without requiring binding commitments or regulatory harmonization.

Agendas such as energy, infrastructure, health, disaster risk management, and food security illustrate this orientation. These domains produce economically relevant externalities while avoiding the distributive conflicts historically associated with trade liberalization and market integration. In this sense, the Brasília Consensus contributes to regional economic governance through functional and sector-specific coordination rather than through explicit commercial negotiations. This trajectory can be interpreted as a pragmatic adaptation of regional coordination strategies to the structural constraints of contemporary trade politics.

Conclusions

The Brasília Consensus illustrates both the potential and the constraints of contemporary South American concertation. The early trajectory of the Brasília Consensus demonstrates that light institutional design does not necessarily imply institutional ineffectiveness. Instead, it produces differentiated patterns of agenda activation structured by issue characteristics, institutional legacies, and political sequencing. While certain domains—such as energy, health, disaster risk management and infrastructure—translated rapidly into sustained coordination, others remained inactive within the Consensus framework or were addressed through alternative regional venues.

The absence of explicit commercial negotiations within the Brasília Consensus does not imply disengagement from economic governance. Instead, it reflects a strategic repositioning of regional coordination toward functional domains capable of generating economic spillovers without reopening highly politicized trade negotiations. In this sense, differentiated thematic engagement represents not fragmentation, but adaptive sequencing under conditions of regulatory density and constrained policy autonomy.

The differentiated trajectory observed under the Brasília Consensus also exposes the structural limits of light concertation mechanisms. The documentary corpus reveals uneven administrative investment across thematic axes. While certain areas generated substantial documentary production and structured work plans, others show minimal evidence of bureaucratic activity. This suggests that differentiated engagement under the Brasília Consensus is not merely a function of issue characteristics but also reflects uneven institutional consolidation. The inability to operationalize certain roadmap themes suggests that flexibility, while lowering entry costs, may reduce the mechanism's capacity to sustain engagement in politically sensitive domains. The coexistence of activated and dormant agendas therefore reflects not only strategic sequencing but also the constrained authority and limited enforcement capacity inherent to non-binding frameworks.

This multi-speed dynamic reflects both selective attention allocation and the structural limits of non-binding regional frameworks. By operating as a coordinative umbrella that rearticulates existing regional infrastructures, the Brasília Consensus illustrates how flexible intergovernmental arrangements can generate meaningful yet uneven regional engagement. These findings contribute

to broader debates on regional governance in contexts marked by institutional fragmentation and political volatility, suggesting that contemporary South American regionalism may evolve less through comprehensive integration projects and more through pragmatic, differentiated concertation.

Beyond the South American case, the findings have broader implications for the study of regional governance under conditions of institutional fragmentation. The Brasília Consensus illustrates how light intergovernmental mechanisms may prioritize functional coordination in technically dense sectors while avoiding domains characterized by distributive conflict and regulatory entanglement. This pattern may be observable in other regions where formal integration projects have stalled but governments continue to seek selective coordination. By conceptualizing differentiated agenda engagement as a structural feature rather than a transitional anomaly, this article invites comparative research on how flexible regional platforms adapt to contemporary political and economic constraints.

Data Availability Statement

The documentary corpus used in this article has been deposited in Harvard Dataverse. Interview transcripts have been anonymized prior to deposit. Access conditions are available at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/JYLJV2>

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Appendix A

Documentary Sources Obtained through Freedom of Information Request

This appendix details the documentary corpus obtained through a formal freedom of information request submitted to the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Law No. 20.285 on Access to Public Information (Request No. AC000T0007122; official response dated 24 February 2026).

The request covered documentation produced, received, or archived by the Subsecretariat of Foreign Affairs and related units concerning the Brasília Consensus during the period May 2023–February 2026. The material was delivered in digital format. In accordance with applicable transparency and privacy regulations, certain documents were partially redacted under statutory confidentiality provisions. The principle of divisibility was applied, and personal data were anonymized prior to delivery.

The documentary corpus complements publicly available sources and provides structured evidence regarding meeting recurrence, adoption of work plans, inter-ministerial coordination, and cross-presidency continuity across thematic axes.

A total of 770 documents were identified and delivered, classified into twelve documentary categories:

Document Type	Number of Documents
Meeting minutes, agendas, and records	75
Official letters	5
Declarations, communiqués, and interventions	14
Roadmap documents	4
Reports	51
Memoranda and annexes	59
Official messages and annexes	267
Informative briefs and working documents	28
Diplomatic notes with annexes	176
Presentations	15
Official memoranda (oficios)	69
Work plans	7
Total	770

The corpus reveals substantial variation in documentary density across thematic areas, which informed the classification of engagement levels presented in Section 5. The material was used to corroborate observable engagement—such as convened meetings, adoption of structured work plans, issuance of communications, and establishment of coordination mechanisms—rather than to infer political motivations or internal deliberative dynamics.